

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
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April 7, 2006

Vice Admiral Conrad C. Lautenbacher, Jr. (Ret.)  
Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere  
U.S. Department of Commerce  
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration  
14<sup>th</sup> Street & Constitution Avenue NW  
Room 5128  
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Admiral Lautenbacher:

I appreciated your call yesterday to discuss the concern we share over the report in The Washington Post describing scientists' concerns that the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is limiting discussion about climate change. I was pleased to hear once again that you support open and unfettered scientific communication, as you have stated in the past both to me and in messages to NOAA employees.

However, it seems clear that, despite your commitment, at least some scientists at NOAA continue to feel that the agency is not encouraging open communication. (Our staff has heard such concerns repeatedly; the problem goes beyond the few instances alleged in The Post.) NOAA's efforts to attract, retain and make full use of the nation's best scientists will be stymied if your scientists and the scientific community at-large believe that NOAA seeks to limit the discussion of climate science and its implications. And the issue of climate change is too important to countenance any scientists feeling intimidated or constrained about discussing the matter, regardless of whether that feeling is the result of specific policy actions or of misimpressions that create a stifling atmosphere.

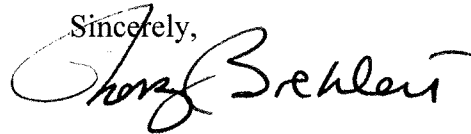
Therefore, I recommend that you swiftly take the following steps, which appear to have helped remedy similar concerns at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA):

- 1) Set up permanently a process that employees will trust by which employees can report concerns when they believe that scientific communication is being suppressed.
- 2) Issue a clear and to-the-point policy – not something convoluted or subject to misinterpretation – that states the principles and policies that govern scientific communication at NOAA, the role of the public affairs office in such communication, and any limits on what NOAA scientists can say as government employees and as private citizens.
- 3) Address in a forthright manner the specific allegations raised in The Post.

- 4) Make sure NOAA's public affairs staff and science managers understand the need for openness and the consequences that will ensue if they try to limit scientific discussion.
- 5) In a timely manner, meet with NOAA scientists around the country to express directly your commitment to open communication and to hear what concerns the scientists may have.

I do not doubt your commitment to openness. I do have to wonder whether that commitment is fully and uniformly being implemented at NOAA and whether scientists and their managers throughout the agency believe the agency is committed to openness.

NOAA scientists play a critical role in understanding climate change and other environmental phenomena. You need to redouble your efforts to ensure that NOAA fosters a truly open atmosphere. I look forward to working with you as you do that.

Sincerely,  


SHERWOOD BOEHLERT  
Chairman

*We need to address this — !*